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## How conservation matters: ethnographic explorations of historic building renovation

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Manuscript ID	MCU-17-0026.R1
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Keywords:	Heritage, Conservation, Buildings, Knowledge, Time, Energy, Environment
Abstract:	<p>This paper focuses on ideas of historic conservation, examining the multiple ways in which these are made to matter through practices of renovation. By-passing normatively inflected literatures on heritage I adopt a more 'agnostic' ethnographic approach, highlighting how conservation involves an imperative of continuity that is elaborated in a multiplicity of ways by conservation and construction professionals, and inhabitants of old buildings. This focus brings to light a series of dynamics that have received limited attention, demonstrating how conservation is practically substantiated in a range of ways including materially, bodily, emotionally, ethically and conceptually.</p>

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**Conservation in Construction: exploring How conservation old buildings are made to matter: ethnographic explorations of historic building renovation**

**Abstract**

This paper focuses on ideas of historic conservation, examining the multiple ways in which these are constructed in practices of renovation. By passing normatively inflected literatures on heritage I adopt a more ‘agnostic’ ethnographic approach. This focus brings to light a series of dynamics that have received limited attention, demonstrating how conservation is practically substantiated in a range of ways including materially, bodily, emotionally, ethically and conceptually. The paper highlights how conservation both constructs and is constructed through these interactions in a multiplicity of ways.

**Introduction**

Why do old buildings matter? In other words, why do they take the material form they do? And why is this important or valuable?

In line with broader approaches to heritage and conservation, answers to these questions have tended to take one of two basic forms. On the one hand, understanding buildings as material embodiments of specific pasts, their value is inherent. If time is linear and un-repeating, as it came to be seen from the enlightenment onwards, old buildings and artefacts are valuable as embodiments of these specific and un-repeatable pasts: as unique materialisations of time (Lowenthal, 1985). While applied and academic literatures might disagree on the specific ways in which that value should be acknowledged and protected, they have shared a basic understanding of conservation as a way of protecting these inherent or authentic qualities; and of the broad value of doing so (Jokilehto, 1999, Pendlebury, 2009). Nineteenth and twentieth century debates were framed by these basic assumptions, which continue to orient a range of scholarly and professional discourses.

By contrast, from about the 1980s onwards, the critical deconstruction of many of these ideas emerged through a range of literatures, loosely referred to as critical heritage studies,

associated with a rather different answer to the question of how and why the past matters. Conservation is not simply a way of recognising qualities that already exist. Rather, it is a social and discursive process of constructing those qualities and of choosing to value them in specific ways (for instance, see Smith, 2006, Herzfeld, 1991, Lowenthal, 1985). Correspondingly, critical heritage scholars have highlighted the political dimensions to these constructions: how conservation objectifies the past in ways that reproduce specific interests and values, notably of neoliberalism (e.g. Franquesa, 2013), the state (e.g. Herzfeld, 1991), and more generally social elites (Smith, 2006), and marginalise other perspectives.

Through ethnographic research focused on practices of renovation in England, this paper explores buildings as sites of literal and conceptual construction.

This paper builds on these broad insights, highlighting the negotiations and tensions that are central to historic conservation, but develops these in a rather different direction. Focusing on the nexus of home owners and building professionals and conservation experts involved in renovation practices in the UK, I seek to highlight how 'conservation' matters in ways that existing accounts have tended to overlook. Central to these practices are concerns with 'conservation', the widespread commitment to the protection and care of buildings as embodiments of the past (Jokilehto, 1999). My account understands conservation as an arena of negotiation in which different interests are related, juxtaposed, disputed and resolved in a multiplicity of ways. By-passing normatively inflected interdisciplinary debates between 'heritage enthusiasts' and 'between-heritage detractors' (see, for instance, Smith, 2006, Holtorf, 2005, Wright, 2009 [1985], Herzfeld, 2010) and heritage enthusiasts (Samuel, 1994), I adopt a more 'agnostic' (Brumann, 2014, Clavir, 2009), classically ethnographic (Yarrow, 2017, Yarrow and Jones, 2014) approach, which highlights how 'the good' (Boyer and Howe, 2015) of conservation is specified and challenged in multiple ways. This ethnographic focus brings to light a series of dynamics that have received limited attention from established perspectives, in which conservation is taken either as a self-evidently positive response to a threatened historic environment (e.g. Ruskin, 1865, ICOMOS, 1964), or as a form of elite dissembling that upholds entrenched social interests (e.g. Smith, 2006).

As has recently been noted (Jones and Yarrow, 2013, Macdonald, 2009, Brumann, 2012, Pendlebury, 2009), deconstructive critiques shed light on the discursive construction of conservation in terms that frequently elide understanding of the specific everyday practices

**Comment [NU1]:** Re-frame this opening:

Why do old buildings matter? Answers to that question have often taken a rather singular form:

-However, in various ways have tended to elide some of the nuances involved: normative analytic orientations to conservation result in insufficient attention to the normativities that are locally at play; efforts to understand conservation as a response to underlying systemic imperatives have tended to overlook how actors work between distinct frameworks of value, posing a range of ethical and practical dilemmas; binary oppositions between conservation as 'authorised heritage discourse' and other local actors, elide how conservation ideals are implicated in multiple, intersecting ways.

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through which these are located. Building on broader ‘post-human’ approaches to materials (particularly Ingold, 2007, Henare et al., 2007), ~~in this context,~~ the paper highlights the multiple ways in which conservation is practically made to matter, in the linked but distinct senses: of being important or valuable; and of taking material form. substantiated— ~~materially, bodily, emotionally, ethically and conceptually.~~

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~~This My focus on conservation in construction, is distinct from constructivism where ‘the social’ is emphasized over and against the material and practical elements of lived reality (see, for example, Latour, 1993) involves a conceptual framing that is developed in two linked directions. Firstly, by exploring the everyday interactions of those involved in renovation, I highlight how concerns with conservation make buildings matter are associated with the construction of buildings as specific objects of knowledge and intervention. Conservation, from this perspective, is not a deterministic or straightforwardly procedural response to, after the fact of a building’s inherent historic and material qualities.~~ Rather it is a way of assigning, negotiating and practically realising those qualities through the interactions of various actors. These acts of substantiation construction are multiple (compare Mol, 2002), since different professional and domestic practices train attention to buildings in distinctive ways. ~~Thus the My~~ account traces how ‘conservation’ objectifies buildings as is located as a situationally specific objects of attention, interest and value.

Comment [NU2]: Reference to Tait and While, Strebel, Yaneva; In Strebel’

This point relates to a second focus on the ways in which conservation is made to matter through is constructed through these interactions. ~~I approach c~~Conservation, ~~I suggest, is~~ not a self-evident principle determining practice in a singular way but a concept whose meaning must be extended and reconfigured as it is located (see Pendlebury, 2009, Jones and Yarrow, 2013): by specific building professionals and clients, in relation to particular buildings, documents, regulatory frameworks and tools of various kinds. Conservation principles ~~Expert efforts to know develop through training and skilled practices that are~~ ‘deflected’ (Yaneva, 2008) by the practices and concerns of other actors, as well as through the quotidian challenges posed by specific material and spatial agencies. From this perspective, the paper considers how conservation- ideals are extended through their application to specific contexts ~~is practically located as specific articulations of people and place.~~ The question of whether and how conservation is privileged is political, insofar some

Comment [NU3]: Some time ago these negotiations were highlighted by Herzfeld, who noted, state bureaucrats are also ‘situated actors struggling to bend partly recalcitrant boundaries.’ (13); ‘in practice they must confront an enormous array of decisions to be made and risks to be taken. They must work with conflicting official guidelines on the one side, and under constant social pressure on the other’ (14); however these dynamics were relatively un-developed in his own ethnography and have remained peripheral in subsequent ethnographic accounts.

people's interests are privileged at the expense of others. Yet, inspired by recent work in anthropology (Laidlaw, 2014, Lambek, 2015), I also want to highlight how this involves the everyday negotiation of ethics: different visions of 'the good' are at stake in a range of dilemmas about what should be kept and why.

I start from a position of analytic 'symmetry' (Latour, 1993), developing insights from actor-network theory to understand ~~assuming~~ conservation ~~as to be~~ a way of thinking, seeing and acting that is practically 'performed' (Mol, 2002): through actions that assemble people, places, buildings, documents, representational technologies and materials, in various configurations. Even so, I highlight how a classically ethnographic approach to these issues situates the account in specific, less symmetrical, ways that privilege actors' understandings of the entities and agencies involved. In what follows I focus ~~therefore seek to understand~~ ~~the assemblage of 'conservation' primarily on the~~ ~~through a lens that is trained on the~~ ~~people involved in renovation: their~~ explanations of those involved: of what they do and why, and the practical circumstances in which these commitments arise.

**Comment [NU4]:** R1: reference to assemblage theory?

**Comment [NU5]:**

### Situating Conservation

My understanding of these dynamics is based on a four month period of ethnographic fieldwork, undertaken in 2014, exploring the nexus of building professionals, planners and home owners, involved in practices of renovation. Based in a small architectural practice, I observed how renovation emerged through their daily interactions with one another, clients, planners, conservation officers, builders and others. Additionally I undertook detailed semi-structured interviews, with those involved in these projects, and analysed key planning policies and professional publications. My focus on domestic renovations encompassed a range of building types and ages, with various degrees and kinds of heritage protection. Located in the Cotswolds, an area I know well, amongst a predominantly middle-class cohort of British professionals and domestic inhabitants, I encountered epistemic and methodological issues common to other forms of anthropology 'at home' (Jackson, 1987): while unfamiliar professional practices took time to understand, the more profound

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challenge was to critically interrogate those assumptions, in Riles’ terms, ‘too well known to be described’ (Riles, 2001: 18).

In a seminal account of the rise of the ‘heritage industry’ Patrick Wright observes: ‘Delight in continuity and cumulation is integral to English appreciation of genius loci; the enduring idiosyncrasies that lend places their precious identity’ (Wright, 2009 [1985]: xvii). In the UK Cotswolds, the focus of this paper, these enduring idiosyncrasies are valued and protected as part of what Pendlebury describes as a ‘conservation consensus’: ideas legislatively inscribed in the Town and Country planning acts after the second World War, allied to interlinked social and institutional changes that render conservation ‘an increasingly accepted, even inevitable value’ (2009: 1) in specific ways: landscapes redolent of national identity are subject to legislative protection as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, just as historic townscapes are protected by an unusually high preponderance of Conservation areas and individually ‘listed’ buildings. Since the 1940s, buildings have been legislatively protected through ‘listings’ applied to individual properties and ‘conservation areas’, intended to conserve the historic character of townscapes, particularly in relation to external appearance. Introduced as part of the Town and Country Planning act, the broad rationale for these historic designations has remained as a commitment to the retention of ‘cultural values’ relating to ‘architectural significance’, even as interpretation of those values and that significance has shifted: broadly, away from 1960s concerns with beauty and aesthetics towards the extrinsic ‘values’ these buildings have, whether interpreted in social or economic terms (Pendlebury, 2009). The ‘traditional’ vernacular stone buildings of the Cotswolds are central to regional and national identity, and are strongly protected through legislation. Conservation legislation exists in relation to a broader conservation nexus, a set of ideas that circulate through public discourses and media representations of various kinds, including prime time television programmes on the renovation and conservation of old buildings, and a range of popular lifestyle magazines.

In the contemporary context, these broadly articulated ideas about the need for historic conservation, are refracted through specific forms of expert and domestic practice, associated with distinct assessments of what a building ‘is’ and how to conserve this. By no means universally shared, ideas of conservation are ‘plurally ubiquitous’ (Samuel, 1994:

**Comment [NU6]:** More here on the broader context (Reviewer one):  
Global ‘heritage inflation’ (Franquesa; cf. Lowenthal, Herzfeld), a broad consensus about the need to protect the past, and the general principles that should inform this, promoted by a coalition of international heritage organisations, and consolidated through successive treaties. Reflecting this broader context, Pendlebury describes how in the UK conservation has become ‘an increasingly accepted, even inevitable value’. He traces this consensus to post-WW2, when the Town and Country Planning Act (1944; 47) established the broad rationale for the importance of building conservation as the retention of cultural values relating architectural significance. Within this framework emphasis has shifted from the 1960s focus on beauty and visible history to more recent concerns with social and economic value. As a specific development of broader shifts in conservation thinking, a concern with original fabric (i.e. post Venice charter) remains central to planning and conservation practice, even as there has recently been a greater focus on the extrinsic values (social and economic) that derive from these. One might characterise this situation as ‘after authenticity’: even as intrinsic understandings of historic authenticity are partly superseded by a concern to manage their extrinsic values. Intersecting with these more formal considerations that are the purview of planning and conservation expects, commitments to conservation are shaped through public discourses and media representations of various kinds including: prime time television programmes on the renovation and conservation of old buildings (Restoration Man; Grand Designs); and a range of lifestyle magazines celebrating the virtues of  
  
Underlying this broad consensus, Pendlebury highlights the more or less sharply opposed commitments that underlie this: ‘conservation is not a homogenous community; neither are its practitioners an homogenous group’. The remainder of the paper is an ethnographic elaboration and exploration of this point: an effort to trace out how conservation provides an overarching imperative of continuity, elaborated by specific people, in relation to specific buildings.

281), framing a range of issues with which home owners and building professionals grapple,

including:

Is the character of a building best conserved through historic accuracy or is its very nature to change? Is 'originality' a matter of a specific period or building style, or of a full and 'honest' expression of the entirety of its historical development? Does the character of a building reside only as an embodiment of past people and events, or can it be enhanced as it is modified in response to the lives of contemporary inhabitants?

~~Broadly articulated ideas about the need for historic conservation, are refracted through specific forms of expert and domestic practice, associated with distinct assessments of what a building 'is' and how to conserve this.~~

While the ethnographic focus is regionally and temporally specific to this context, many of these tensions have broader resonance. The conservation consensus of the UK reflects and refracts a wider 'global inflation' (Franquesa, 2013: 358) of interest in heritage, specifically in the form of international charters and treaties through which shared principles have been consolidated and disseminated. The practices of home-owners and non-professionals are less directly framed by these principles but even so resonate with accounts from other geographical contexts, in orientations to valuing the past configured against an understanding of the destructive possibilities of modernity (Brumann, 2012, Brumann, 2014).

In the following sections I explore these tensions and negotiations, through specific narratives and vignettes that are illustrative of this multiplicity, rather than generally representative.

### **Refractions of Conservation**

I meet Kate Clare, a Local Authority conservation officer in the offices of Stroud District Council, a converted mill beside a river. 'A nice place to work' she comments, pointing to the exposed ashlar walls: 'look at those stones. You've got all the various different people who did the masons' mark, and you can almost see their different characters. Every day I have a look at these stones and think 'good grief, who are they?' She tells me how her interest in conservation developed from 'a passion for old buildings':

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**Comment [NU7]:** Introduce her as conservation officer.



‘I think they are a testament to the past, and I like the bits that are gone as much as I like the bits that are still here. It is the people more than anything, it’s a kind of respect for them. I like a survivor. And I think people [today] don’t associate historic buildings with the people that built them or the reasons that they were made or the social changes, and so that’s what fascinates me. It’s from a historic context as well as obviously [they are] an aesthetic, beautiful thing. Mostly I can’t look at them without seeing what caused them to be built; I like the bits that are missing as well, I like the poignant bits that are gone, or the scars, all of those things.’

She is explicit about the romantic sensibility that informs her perspective, which she connects to the nineteenth century conservation movement, and particularly the work of John Ruskin and William Morris.

Respect for the crafts, respect for changes over time, and just a basic respect for the people that built it, and not to be so presumptuous as to take things away. Because it is a presumption, you wouldn’t do it in front of the person if the person was standing there, you wouldn’t go ‘ah, knock it down’, it would hurt their feelings!

She expresses these ideals, aware they are in some ways at odds with the current circumstances in which she practices: the former role of conservation officer as detached ‘patrician elite’ (Pendlebury) has been undermined by Local Authority cuts to funding since the 2008 financial crises and, more generally, by policy changes that emphasize conservation as an ‘enabler’ of development. Even as she accepts the inevitability of these changes, there is a wistful nostalgia for the apparent certainties of this earlier professional context and the more straightforward historical ‘truths’ to which they related. Her personal and professional commitments to ‘the building’ have their counterpart in trained ways of seeing, in her own words, ‘from the building’s point of view’. The past of a building comes into focus through a ‘skilled vision’ (Grasseni, 2007b), a professionally inculcated way of seeing accumulated through training and decades of professional practice. ~~work. This is evident when accompanying her on visits to buildings and to meet clients.~~ Drawing on her formal and practical professional experience, historic contexts are unfolded from the evidence she has available. When Kate Clare makes her assessments she starts from the perspective of the building and its setting. Some of this is known to her from previous visits

**Comment [NU8]:** She expresses these ideals, aware they are in some ways an idealism at odds with the current circumstances in which she practices: where the former role of the conservation officer as ‘patrician elite’ (Pendlebury) has been undermined by local authority cuts to funding; and by moves to reframe conservation as allied to development. Even as she accepts these circumstances there is a wistful nostalgia for the certainties of this earlier professional context, and the more straightforward historical ‘truths’ to which these related.

**Comment [NU9]:** Briefly elaborate – e.g. a way of seeing acquired through training and decades of practice...

and applications. Estate agents pictures and plans are accumulated and archived from online sites, to help to understand the internal layout. Another key tool is GIS. Different filters are switched between to build up a sense of the building and its context: the delineation of conservation areas, aerial photographs. Historic maps are 'ridiculously useful', showing the development of settlements and the 'broader historic context'. What Kate Clare sees in these buildings relates to *how* and *with what* she sees them (cf. Grasseni, 2007a, Strebel, 2011).

**Comment [NU10]:** Plus reference ?Strebel – i.e. who says we need to think not what people say about buildings but what they do with them.

Through these practices time is related to the material circumstances of old buildings. As 'evidence', it is unfolded as understandings about people, events, and activities through which their form and structure was made and re-made. This temporal understanding, sequential and progressive, is then folded back into those structures and materials as assessments of 'historic significance', 'character' and 'authenticity', key terms by which buildings are formally assessed, and in relation to which decisions are made (Jones and Yarrow, 2013, Jokilehto, 1999). As embodiments of specific histories, old buildings have a value as a finite and fragile resource, relating to a particular understanding of time as linear and un-repeating that emerged in eighteenth century Europe (Lowenthal, 1985). The approach underscores a personal sense of ethical commitment ~~that informs the role she performs as a conservation officer~~. Commenting on planning proposals relating to listed buildings or those in conservation areas, her role, as she puts it, is 'to do what's right for the building', even to the extent this may conflict with the interests and ideas of those who now live there: 'my job is to deal with the buildings not the owners'. As an instance of a wider professional commitment to 'monumental time' (Herzfeld, 1991) ~~c~~Conservation, from her perspective, is a way of objectifying the building as a function of its past. Notwithstanding recent shifts to a 'values based approach' her commitments to these buildings take precedence over, distinct from contemporary people and interests.

**Comment [NU11]:** ?Herzfeld: 'monumental time'

For conservation officers, seeing buildings 'from the past', orients a particular way of understanding their present and future. Application of these ideals is not straightforward. Kate Clare explains:

**Comment [NU12]:** Refer to Heritage Futures?

It's a matter of going back to what makes this building significant in the first place. ~~So~~ If, for example, it's as a small, unaltered, vernacular cottage, if you're ~~actually~~ going

to ~~do anything to~~ extend that [...], ~~for example,~~ then that takes that inherent significance away from it, so an extension wouldn't be appropriate. If, on the other hand, you've got a massive great sprawling house with wings all over the place then it might be perfectly acceptable to put quite a large extension on because that is part of its character, that it's got these massive evolutions and bits and bobs scattered all over the place [...], ~~so that might be absolutely fine.~~ ~~So it's~~ just a question of coming back to what makes this building special.

Ideas about 'character' inform attributions of 'historic significance' as ways of locating elements of central importance, distinct from those elements that can be modified or changed:

Even though they're not pickled they are supposed to be examples of a building type, building style, or a particularly significant point in time, as it were, and so to take that away is then to sort of remove the point of it. But it does depend entirely why the building is of interest, and the presumption is in favour of preservation ultimately.

Conservation, from this perspective, is a way of managing change so that the present and future of a building emerges with 'respect' to valued elements of its past. This general orientation is broadly articulated by conservation professionals, framing (without entirely determining) a multiplicity of practices through which character is attributed and constructed (Jones and Yarrow, 2013): through the drafting of documents that designate and define these qualities; the interpretation of national policy as local planning guidance; and myriad daily judgments consenting or blocking proposed developments.

Different forms of expert practice are associated with different orientations to ways of performing the past of old buildings. Sociologist Dawn Lyon argues that 'Builders monopolise the physical manipulation of the building as process and object...The physicality and tactility of building work produces men (...) with their hands in the 'guts' of the building which they know through habit, in an embodied or tacit way.' (Lyon, 2012: 7). She contrasts this way of knowing with that of engineers and architects, who, in the context of her ethnography amongst British building professionals, 'knew the building as a conceptualised

space, through drawings and measurements, reports and schedules.' (2012: 7). What might this imply as an orientation to historic conservation?

In the UK domestic house renovations are usually undertaken by small-scale builders, who often work directly for the client, particularly in cases where formal planning consent is unnecessary. In the Cotswolds, the predominance of traditionally constructed buildings means that most general builders will routinely encounter these in the course of their work. A small proportion of these specialise in conservation work, through training in traditional construction techniques and conservation principles; some pick these up 'on the job' and through interactions with conservation officers. Most of those I encountered professed a general enthusiasm for working with old buildings, even in the absence of specific conservation skills. This was not necessarily incompatible with complaints about this kind of work, specifically insofar as traditionally constructed buildings have structural characteristics can be difficult to reconcile with contractual ways of work.

Originally trained as a carpenter, Marcus Mark runs a small construction company, mostly renovating Georgian and Victorian houses. I meet him in his own, a Georgian house which he has been renovating over the past five years. 'Still a way to go!' he jokes, gesturing around to exposed plasterwork and wiring. The house appealed because of its past. He sees the work he is doing as a way of carrying that forwards to the future:

In this house, like in a lot of houses I'm sure there's a whole gamut from joy to dreariness, but yes there is a sense of lives, the whole cycle, births and deaths, joys and sorrows. And I suppose I'm contributing to that as well. If the house still stands in 100 years' time people will look at the things that I've done, I'm sure there will be some vestiges of what I've done to the house and they might not be conscious of me, they almost certainly won't be, but it will affect their lives in a hopefully positive way.

As a builder there is a specific kind of connection: 'It's a very physical thing, the relationship that I have with the building. Sometimes I want to hit it. I take pleasure in knocking out a wall or being quite brutal to a building, so it is a physical relationship with the building, and that's something that I enjoy.' Watching him at work, on a domestic renovation, I see how

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the past is experienced corporeally and viscerally through the materials encountered through building work. On one occasion he picks up a nineteenth century brick from a pile created by the demolition of an internal wall, running his hand over the surface, as he explains how it came to have its distinctive mottled pattern ‘All the others are flat – you see it was raining on that day’. Elsewhere he shows me the back of a cupboard where the plasterwork is noticeably less well finished: ‘That’s where the apprentice would have practiced.’ He knows roughly when the building was constructed, but the past disclosed through these encounters, is less of a chronologically sequenced ‘history’, than of the more intimate, if more fleeting sense of connection to those who built it.

**MarcusMark** has no formal training in building conservation but describes how the physical intimacy of working in these buildings engenders a specific way of understanding and caring for their past: ‘There is a big sense of responsibility; you’re making big decisions that have irreversible consequences for the house’. Working with them intimately, normally only on one at a time, brings a specific kind of responsibility:

The work that I do, the timescale, it’s not as though I work on 100 different places, it’s not like an architect who might work on lots and lots of places and each one is kind of an experiment and each one they’re learning from. I am doing that but I’m there more intimately.

**MarcusMark** acknowledges and bemoans the structural constraints and pragmatic considerations that can, in practice, make it difficult to be as ‘respectful’ of this history as he would like.

There’s a satisfaction in seeing good craftsmanship from the past and feeling that what you’re doing is at least as good, often better. The frustration is usually about time and money, that you know what would be more sympathetic [...] but a lot of people don’t know and don’t care because they just want their house finished.

He echoes others in the construction industry, highlighting how the development of standardised building materials and approaches is associated with diminished skill that militates against sensitivity to existing structures, a tension that is likewise noted by Brumann (2012) in the context of Japan. If a conservationist impulse is sometimes curtailed

**Comment [NU13]:**

**Comment [NU14]:** As Franquesa notes of artisan builders in Spain, Mark articulates a tension between values of a capitalist system in which he works; and commitments to a ‘craft’ ideal that responds to a different logic.

by factors beyond his control, ~~Marcus~~Mark is also explicit in highlighting how his own interests in old buildings differ from a more purely conservationist approach: 'Often it is applied too literally. In the past they were not concerned with conservation in the way we are now. In the past they were less self-conscious they just did what they thought was right'.

As a builder he recognises good craftsmanship in the buildings he works on, but ~~claims is also aware~~ these were often badly constructed, for people who lived differently than they do today. ~~From his perspective the~~ preservation of 'original' features, is less important than upholding to traditions of 'good craftsmanship' (Yarrow and Jones, 2014). Implicit in what he says is a more widely articulated understanding of the authenticity of trade practice, linked to concern about the inauthenticity of conservation itself: in his terms, an 'artificial' effort to arrest time.

Architects sometimes articulate similar frustrations. Like builders they must work with a range of practical, financial and legislative constraints, though their own professional practices are oriented by distinct considerations of creativity and design. Rob, an architect at Millar Howard Workshop, a small practice of architects working in the Cotswolds, describes how design possibilities are opened up and closed down, as a response to the place in which they work: 'Not just materially but spatially and geometrically as well...For someone like me, who really enjoys that layering of history, or the layering of time and fabric and problems and ideas, and responding to something that's already existing is usually more interesting than having a completely blank canvas.'

Design, as he sees it, is a way of unfolding the past – towards the present and into the future. The role of the architect is to understand the 'stories' that buildings materially disclose, and then to re-narrate them. Rob explains:

You have to make a judgment on how valuable the existing fabric is, and what stories or what narratives it contains, be it old stone walls, which were there for hundreds of years, or whether it's a bit of timber that's been burnt in some old fire.

Less important than historic 'significance' and 'truth', as conservation professionals might understand those terms, is narrative interest:

Architectural history can be represented in that but there's also the personal things that I've come across, in terms of the wear on a stone step or something like that, that you might really try and go out of your way to retain in the new building.

He, like others in the practice, are often compelled, interested and inspired by these artefacts of un-known and intimate pasts. Connections are made in different ways through design practice: from the literal retention of an existing structure, to the understanding of a more generic sense of what is materially and visually 'appropriate': 'Materials and place and stuff', as Rob puts it. Even so, the nature of their work involves a necessary disconnection from that past. Building histories are interpreted in the context of a wider brief. Paid by clients to adapt them to their needs, the starting point is always in some sense a 'problem' that needs to be overcome. Structurally, Architects are professionally predisposed to reconcile invested in reconciling buildings to the needs of their clients more than vice-versa. Una explains: 'using what is there as an inspiration for dealing with the problem', a building's history is one element to consider amongst many: 'changing that or manipulating that and making it better ... I really imagine, 'okay, that family is going to live there, how are they going to live there', and then try and work out the design based on that and what we think would be best for them.'

The virtues of historic conservation have a complex relationship with professional architectural norms that valorise creativity, novelty and innovation. Brumann highlights a similar tension in the context of Koto, Japan, where 'vernacular architecture that traditionally aimed inconspicuously blend in with the surroundings...do not always sit comfortably with the wish to leave one's personal mark' (2012: 149) As a creative endeavour, architectural design is oriented from actuality to possibility (Murphy, 2004). The past is an 'influence' and 'inspiration' for something new and different. Dave, another architect in the practice, explains how architectural training engenders the capacity to see beyond what already exists: 'Physical form is so persuasive, we live in it, that part of training to be an architect is to sort of disengage from it, and somehow be able to escape the seduction of it in order to manipulate it.' This way of seeing is enabled by a range of practical orientations: site visits provide 'inspiration' in the form of 'direct experience' of existing material circumstances. Creative possibilities are subsequently cultivated through

representational technologies that move them beyond this: sketching and computer modelling materialise shifts in scale, and are central to the move architects aim to make from the actual to the possible. ~~In various ways these representational technologies enable the de-materialisation of existing 'realities' in ways that are associated with an opening-up of imaginative thinking.~~

Clients engage architects for these skills and capacities, but while home owners also routinely espouse the virtues of old buildings, domestic occupation attunes these concerns in specific ways. Conceived as 'property', renovation is often considered 'an investment' and modifications are undertaken with an explicit awareness of 'adding value' (Franquesa, 2013, Lawrence-Zuniga, 2016) ~~(Lawrence-Zuniga, 2016) (Franquesa, 2013) concerns that are particularly pronounced in the Cotswolds, an area in close proximity to London with high property values.~~ Retaining or enhancing 'character', can be consistent with this understanding of

Comment [NU15]: Cf. Franquesa

house as property, to the extent that 'character' attracts a financial premium. ~~Nevertheless, the value and is often stressed by estate agents. Understandings~~ of buildings as commodities sometimes conflict with the meanings a building acquires as the locus of domestic and family life (Brand, 1994, Miller, 2001): as a 'home', houses are extended and altered to reflect the lives and needs of their occupants, ~~and are often seen as profound expressions of personal identity~~ (Miller, 2001). Both these orientations can prompt changes to buildings, through forms of renovation intended as adaptations to family life. Tom, the owner of an un-listed nineteenth century woollen weavers' cottage, reflects: 'Our house, I suppose, reflects us. And who we are has been shaped by what that house is able to do.' His comments have broader resonance, exemplifying how the construction of an 'authentic' self, emerges through the negotiation of the authenticity of material contexts (Jones, 2010).

~~In various ways home owners confront and resolve the tension that Jones observes within modernist framings of authenticity more generally: buildings are imagined as entities in their own right, things with individualised 'personality' and 'character' of their own, but this essence arises through a history of interactions with others.~~ Occupants describe how their own lives are affected by the buildings they live in: 'feel', 'atmosphere', 'character' and 'personality' are sensed and experienced through practices of daily domestic life, and are linked to myriad ways of registering the past, including: as expressions of personal and



~~I think~~ that's the thing with old buildings, I feel like I'm a custodian of it, rather than an owner who can just bend it to my will and to hell with the consequences. We weren't thinking that we'd stay here forever, so we wanted what we did to it to feel

like it would be good for other people, practically, so we could sell it, but also for the benefit of the house.

Attributions of 'personality' and 'character' create an ethical imperative that orients a series of decisions regarding the nature and scope of 'appropriate' modification. The conservationist imperative to 'retain' is constructed through these encounters as differently articulated versions of what a building 'is'. By the same token it literally constructs the essence it pre-supposes (compare Samuel, 1994): ~~as such~~ ideas are materially 'performed' in specific decisions of what to keep, remove or enhance.

Even as those involved in the renovation, regulation and inhabitation of old buildings express common sentiments about their importance, the past is located, elaborated and understood in specific ways. Different practices and subject positions orient, and are oriented by, different understandings of history, which in turn frame different orientations to the question of whether and how to conserve this. Conservation involves multiple efforts to specify the relationship between the time, space, form and material composition of buildings. My account of these practices highlights how conservation ~~matters constructs, both as in various ways~~ an imperative ~~both~~ to intervention and non-intervention. At the same time, it makes clear how those involved figure these activities as elaborations that are after the fact of buildings as pre-existing agents. ~~This is not to say that they deny their own role in these constructions, but rather to highlight how they imagine this to be pre-figured by the existing reality of the building as an individualised entity.~~ Conservation, as a commitment to the past, is a way of asking what a building 'is' in order to specify what it can legitimately become. The following section traces how the answer to this question arises in more or less sharply contrasting answers, as differences that are related, negotiated and aligned in a range of ways.

### Co-ordinating Conservation

Dave, an architect, describes how his ~~own~~ concerns with adaptation sometimes conflicts with a more purely conservationist interpretation: 'My first encounter with the conservation officer was quite confrontational, and I went away rather shocked. I said, 'oh, we're thinking of taking this bit down', and she said, 'what!' And it became apparent that in being an

**Comment [NU16]:** Some of these discourses echo Herzfeld's opposition between the 'monumental time' that reads buildings as instances of a teleological state narrative of history; and the social

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advocate for the building they regarded the building as a historic document. Not just in its 16th century sense, but all the way through to the present.’ Having lived in the area most of his adult life, he is enthusiastic about the building traditions of the area but critical of reified understandings of ‘tradition’ ~~that can be inimicable to change~~: ‘We allow history to sort of stunt our imaginations sometimes. And yes, it’s a wonderful history. Not to do it down at all. It ends up being almost an obstacle.’ Tom, is enthusiastic about ‘the rich architectural heritage of the area’, but echoes other architects in highlighting reservations about the application of heritage legislation in planning: ‘at no other point in time have people wanted to stop time in that way’. He highlights the paradox that a conservationist antipathy to change is itself peculiarly modern. Conservation as an imperative of continuity can be elaborated in different, potentially conflicting, forms, as continuity of process or as continuity of fabric and form (Jones, 2010, Yarrow and Jones, 2014, Brumann, 2012).

These narratives of difference do not imply fragmentation (Mol, 2002). In various ways different constructions of conservation are related, coordinated and made to cohere. At ~~the Mount~~, a grade two listed former mill, in the heart of the Cotswolds there is a meeting to discuss plans for major renovation work. Architects, clients, electrical engineers and a quantity surveyor discuss different options, with significant implications for the future of the building. The conservation officer is not in attendance, but her views, known from a previous informal consultation and second guessed from other interactions, are also a significant element of the discussion that develops. AnnaCathy and her husband, both accountants, still live in London but plan to retire here. She, in particular, stresses the appeal of the ‘character’ of the building, deploying a term with wide currency amongst middle-class home owners in the UK (Shove et al., 2007, Yarrow, 2016) and other Euro-American contexts (e.g. Lawrence-Zuniga, 2016). Often connected to the personification of buildings as entities with ‘personality’ and ‘life’, the concept connotes the sense of a valued and specific essence, that is more than the sum of its parts and frames a shared commitment to conservation. AnnaCathy observes: ‘It’s about working together with the conservation officer. We’re saying we want to preserve all of the history’. In practice, this attachment to history is part of a complex negotiation, involving interactions between clients and ~~a range of~~ building professionals.

**Comment [NU17]:** Herzfeld contrasts the conservationist ideal of ‘monumental time’, a logic that renders buildings as instances of national history, with the social time of residents, that is, defined through informal relations and social interactions. In the Cotswolds the contrast is less straightforwardly between this conservationist orientation and others; more saliently it emerges as different ways of understanding the past, and of elaborating its significance in relation to the present. As in the context of Japan discussed by Brumann, ideas of continuity as process, emerge alongside ideas of continuity of fabric and form, as complex, context specific assessments, associated with dilemmas and conflicts of various kinds.

At times the virtues of the building's historic character are stressed, in relation to specific 'features' to retain or enhance through renovation. More and less explicitly ideas about the positive qualities of the building's 'character' inform situated assessments about what is 'appropriate' and 'in keeping'; and by the same token what is 'out of character' and therefore subject to modification. Concerns with conservation and continuity attune attention to the building in specific ways, through interactions that pose and resolve a series of questions about the nature and consequence of a building's past. Downstairs, we congregate around one of the stone mullioned windows. Views of the other side of the valley are distantly visible through the leaded fenestration and irregular crown glass. In this instance the assessment of client and architect align easily with the assumed view of the conservation officer: 'Great aren't they!?' the architect pronounces, to assenting smiles and nods. Shared understandings of authenticity are implicit in aesthetic judgments about their value. A decision is made and noted by the architect as an action arising: the windows will stay.

Even within a single meeting, the imperative to conserve is elaborated in multiple ways. The client's brief has various elements. To make the building more suitable for the life of their family, they are keen to make the building 'lighter' and 'more comfortable'. They like to cook and spend time in the kitchen, which they plan to enlarge. During the meeting discussion focuses on a wall, highlighted by the conservation officer as having original eighteenth century plaster that should be retained. It produces a 'design anomaly', Tomas the architect remarks, bringing it into focus through pointing hands gesticulating between the plan and the wall which is now the focus of a loosely congregated semi-circle: 'That's a bit weird', AnnaCathy assents, remarking on the strangely shaped room that results from keeping it: 'It's too dark – it's so dark.' Tomas the architect agrees: 'Let's negotiate with the conservation officer, I think she'll give in'. Later, in the attic room, intended as their master bedroom, there's also concern about the lack of light and views. AnnaCathy is keen to push for the addition of a dormer window. Tomas cautions against this, knowing that without evidence of historic precedence it will almost certainly be rejected: 'We need to choose our battles'. Through these interactions various forms of expertise are negotiated, in relation to one another, to the material circumstances of the building and to broader regulatory frameworks.

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Issues of *how to apply a broadly conservationist logic of continuity, intersect with issues of*  
*how much importance this should be given in relation to other moral, pragmatic and ethical*  
*concerns.* At times the historic conservation is an explicit focus of attention, in other  
moments these concerns are the background context to other issues. Sometimes  
~~considerations of conservation are entirely obviated by others.~~ As we tour the house, the

meeting shifts to focus on questions relating to the mechanical and electrical infrastructure  
entailed in the renovation and extension work. For Eric, the Mechanical and Electrical  
engineer, the building is one of heating, lighting, electricity, energy. He understands the  
building as a series of circuits and flows, materialised through the diagrams he draws and  
consults; expressed through the pointing hands that direct attention to where the electrical  
infrastructure might go. For David, the Quantity Surveyor, it is a building of costs and  
budgets, a way of seeing enabled and expressed through the mundane technology of  
calculator and balance sheet. He has to understand the design, the heating, the lighting,  
structural issues – in fact everything – but only in relation to this very narrow concern: ‘How  
much will it all add up to?’

Renovation brings together various forms of knowledge and perspectives that are expressed  
and resolved as specific articulations between people, building, material and place. The  
technology of meeting (Yarrow, 2017) is premised on and creates the perspectival  
articulation of these differences as multiple views on ‘the same’ building: An agenda,  
pointing hands (Gibson, 1979), tacit conventions of discursive turn-taking and expectations  
of resolution are ways of staging, focusing, coordinating and aligning these differences.  
Multiplicity takes a form that anticipates its resolution as ‘actions’ of a singular kind (Brown  
et al., 2017). Many versions of the building co-exist but not all of these have equal weight in  
determining the relationship between ‘what is’ and ‘what will be’. The everyday politics of  
conservation is a matter of the situational negotiations through which some ways of  
knowing gain traction at the expense of others. These involve a subtle interplay that is not  
well captured through broad brush deconstructions of Authorised Heritage Discourse as the  
disassembling of elite interest (pace Smith, 2006).

**Reconstructing Conservation**

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Comment [NU18]: The issue of how to conserve the building, intersects with how much

Comment [NU19]: Or the Herzfeld point might better come here as a conclusion?

Amongst the many interests enjoined through renovation, considerations of energy performance have become increasingly central, driven by pragmatic concerns to reduce costs as energy prices rise, as well as by environmental concerns linked to climate change (see Yarrow, 2016). These concerns, ~~themselves multiple~~, are situated through contexts of renovation in a range of ways. How, then, are old buildings objectified in relation to these concerns? How do interests in energy and the environment re-construct old buildings as embodiments of history?

**Comment [NU20]:** And Fousecki

Recent concerns with energy efficiency and climate change are associated with various discourses that render old buildings newly problematic, as embodiments of 'inefficiency' and environmental unsustainability (Cassar, 2005). Judith, a semi-retired artist, lives in a detached Victorian house in the affluent market town of Chipping Norton. Now in her mid-sixties, she moved there almost forty years ago when her four children were living at home. She traces the genesis of her own environmental concerns, and relates the difficulty of reconciling these ideals with the fact of living in a large Victorian house:

**Comment [NU21]:** RI more context: The introduced individuals' rhetoric, ethical concerns, and past experiences (such as having lived in a commune) and the closeness of the area to the financial capital of Greater London and the intellectual capital of many leading educational institutions suggests that they are probably not your average English house owner/craftsperson/architect/etc. For a start, they are probably not migrants to the UK or their children. Some more detail about their backgrounds might help to place them.

~~Well,~~ I am really aware of the impact that the way that we live has on the earth and climate change and the effects that's going to have, and the awareness as individuals that we need to try and do what we can. That does make a difference, if everybody does it. The population is so vast that it's hard to imagine what you do in your house can have any effect, but I do believe that and I always have done. Way back in the early '70s, when we were living on a commune, we were thinking those things then. The climate change issue hadn't really established itself strongly then but we were very aware, I suppose, of materialism and the effect it was having on the planet. So I have always been aware of that and I suppose I feel sad that I haven't really...I haven't followed that through. I wish that my life had more integrity.

**Comment [NU22]:** Lives in a double fronted Victorian house in the market town of Chipping Norton. Now in her sixties, she moved there almost thirty years ago, when her four children were living at home

Concerns with climate change attune attention to her domestic space in new ways that render this as 'leaky', 'drafty', 'un-sustainable' and ~~is~~ hence as ethically problematic. Aware and committed to environmental conservation as much as she is to the conservation of the built environment, she sees no easy reconciliation: 'You live with conflict and contradiction'.

Just as environmental concerns can make old buildings seem newly problematic, energy efficiency measures are associated with a range of interventions, including double-glazing,

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micro-renewables and solid wall insulation, not always easily reconciled with constructions of old buildings as embodiments of history (Cassar, 2005, Fouseki and Cassar, 2015). Energy retrofit represents a threat to historic buildings that can lead to a novel explicitness about the value of what may be lost. Una, an other architect at MHW, describes how energy related retrofit affects how ~~makes newly problematic the way in which~~ she values and understands and values buildings~~the authenticity of old structures~~:

I look at a wall and I think, okay, that's a stone wall, and suddenly I've started looking at walls that look like a stone wall saying that's probably not a stone wall, ~~and I've never had that in my life until I moved to here and started working here~~. I'm suddenly thinking is that a stone wall or actually is that a hyper-insulated wall with stone cladding?

~~In various ways~~ the past becomes more important because at the very moment it is seen to be ~~under~~ threatened (Lowenthal, 1985, Benjamin, 2006). Energy-related modifications alter and de-stabilise old buildings as objects of historic significance, questioning and re-configuring understandings of what is 'real' and 'authentic' in a range of ways. In Gable and Handler's (2003) terms, authenticity remains a goal, even as it is elusive profoundly questionable.

Environmental conservation and historic conservation emerged in the nineteenth century as related movements, specifically through the thinking of William Morris and John Ruskin. Concerns to protect the natural and built environment were articulated as a response to the threat of industrial modernity. As the above examples illustrate, recent concerns with energy and climate change are often associated with ~~elaborations of these overarching commitments leading to distinct, even incompatible, understandings of what should be conserved~~ a tension between these.

~~At the same time, and as a direct response to these discourses,~~ heritage conservation professionals have increasingly sought reconciliation through ideas of 'sustainable heritage'. The Stroud Industrial Heritage Conservation Design Guide, for example, makes the case as follows:

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**Comment [NU24]:** Developments of these overarching commitments to conservation, in ways that may produce distinct and even incompatible understandings of what should be conserved (reference to Harrison et. al?)

Development which, for whatever reason, fails to function well and suit its context, produces a burden for the future – someone, sometime will have to re-think, re-develop and dispose of the physical and social consequences of poor development. At a very basic level, poor development is unsustainable...Building conservation is part of a sustainable approach to development – conserving and, where necessary, adapting old buildings for new uses is recycling on a grand scale

Echoing broader heritage discourses, the sustainability of historic buildings is stressed, in a narrative that renders energy conservation and heritage conservation as complementary endeavours (Cassar, 2005, Fouseki and Cassar, 2015). Interests are narratively aligned in a way that allows for the incorporation of both as a within the singular object, buildings or houses become instances of 'sustainable heritage'.

Rob, an architect in his early thirties, has no specific training in building conservation but even so is sympathetic to the approach. He also sees himself as 'environmentally aware', and professes to be just as he is unconvinced by the environmental claims of many of the new building technologies: 'I think I'm in danger of being very sceptical about environmental arguments because the life cycle [energy] cost of whatever environment plug-on isn't really factored in.' He echoes other building professionals and home owners in seeing buildings and their material components as instances of 'embodied energy':

A UPVC window, for example, yes it's going to save you energy year on year, maybe replacing a single glazed window with a double glazed UPVC, but actually the old wooden window has been there for ages and its energy, its carbon footprint if you like, has been spent. And replacing that with a plastic window that has taken x number of carbon tonnes to produce. Should we be making heating systems more efficient or energy, electricity production more efficient and accepting that some single glazed windows in old buildings is fine? Or even better, just encourage people to put on jumpers.

Critiques of eco-modernisation have their counterpart in narratives that stress the environmental credentials of old buildings. Rob explains, as he highlights the problems of mass-construction techniques: 'There's a lot of lessons that could be learned from history,



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from older buildings ~~and stuff really~~, just in terms of orientation and solar gains and that kind of thing.'

Discourses of heritage conservation and climate change intersect in a range of ways in the context of specific interventions. Interests in energy, environment and heritage are associated with specific practical orientations that 'perform' (Mol, 2002) buildings as different kinds of object. ~~Ideas about the 'character' and 'integrity' of buildings entail visions of wholeness that provide the rationale for the reconciliation of such difference in a range of specific ways.~~

Phil explains how concerns with energy and environment are routine elements of the design process:

We're all constrained by the building regs that are bringing in all these new [energy] standards now, but I think we should all be aiming to design as environmentally friendly and as sustainably as possible. And that's what those elements are working towards, whether it's making buildings more thermally efficient, more airtight...I think it's better building.

A barn conversion he is working on, demonstrates how these regulatory ~~and ideological~~ imperatives that frame concerns to improve energy efficiency, intersect with those of historic conservation. Building regulations align with the clients own desire – part environmental, part financial – to make the building more thermally efficient. As a listed building, the clients concerns to 'retain the character', only partially coincide with the planning assessment of what is legally required. The planning permission statement stipulates the nature and kind of conservation in forensically precise detail, each with a specific rationale, for instance:

Alterations to external elevations made good using matching and wherever possible salvaged materials. Reason: to maintain character of the building and to ensure satisfactory visual relationship of the new development in accordance with Saved Policy EI of the Basingstoke and Deane Borough Local plan. ~~All works of repair, restoration and replacement are to exactly match the original features. Reason: to~~

~~protect the architectural interest of the building in accordance with the guidance contained within the national Planning Policy framework.~~

Poised between these legislative frameworks, Phil encounters the relationship between energy ~~conservation~~ and heritage conservation as a design problem ~~that is. As I watch him at work on the detailed build up that will stipulate the construction of the walls, he explains that while there is no panacea, neither is~~ neither straightforwardly procedural nor ultimately the relationship intractable. ~~His design aims, he explains, 'to keep the original appearance but work in modern construction methods to enable the latest standards of insulation and energy performance.'~~

~~As with other kinds of change, those driven by thermal efficiency raise issues that are dealt with 'on a case by case basis'; 'You have to go through each element and think: how does this sit with the existing building?' Sometimes they align easily; at other times compromise has to be found. The wooden frame will be demolished and re-built, with a timber stud-wall that allows for a greater depth of insulation; original fabric is lost, but the external appearance retained by the re-use of original cladding. Likewise he admits the windows are a 'compromise': double glazing improves efficiency even as there is some loss of historic fabric and character, only partly mitigated by retention of original fenestration detailing.~~

Through these activities, ideas of 'conservation' are practically elaborated constructed and re-constructed in a multiplicity of ways. Even as continuity is stressed, heritage conservation is made to matter in relation to the changes associated with 'energy' and 'climate change' as ~~novel developing~~ objects of interest and concern. Old buildings reconfigure these interests by locating them in specific ways and are literally and conceptually transformed, as they are newly objectified through a range of practices associated with 'energy efficiency'.

#### **Conclusion: Made to Matter Substantiating Conservation**

My account highlights in this paper I have sought to trace how conservation is made to matter constructs and is constructed through practices of renovation, in the linked but distinct senses: of having value and importance; and of taking material form. As a general imperative to continuity, it responds to a perceived divergence between these, where what

**Comment [NU25]:** Not all commitments to the past are framed as 'conservation'. Often analyses have drawn relatively binary distinction between professional narratives and other ways of elaborating the significance of the past. (e.g. Herzfeld, Smith)

Harrison (2016 – Archaeologies of Emergent Presents and Futures, conservation is: 'an heterogeneous and discontinuous series of domains of practice.' (171); very much in tune with this approach my account develops this insight ethnographically, revealing the myriad ways in which these logics are entangled in practice.

Take seriously people's own ideas about 'conservation' as a more or less important animating force; as a 'good' which may intersect with other forms of value but which is not reducible to these – i.e. these discourses may be malleable, bent to specific circumstances in various ways, but even so they are not, in practice, 'empty signifiers' (pace Franquesa)

Rather than read conservation discourses as instances of a systemic imperative, seek to highlight the situated negotiations and ethical dilemmas that occur; how people navigate between versions of conservation which are internally contradictory with one another; and with other kinds of 'good'.

**Comment [NU26]:** Central to this is the relationship between conservation as process and as object: others have highlighted how the process of conservation creates the past as a specific kind of object (e.g. Franquesa, Smith); less attention to the ways in which historic objects, in this instance buildings, are understood to frame and constrain processes of conservation; how practice is a way of drawing out the implications of an existing set of material and aesthetic circumstances.

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is important is materially threatened, and orients practices to bring these into alignment: to make what is valuable endure-

Framed by this overarching imperative to continuity, conservation is made to matter in many ways, that are not well captured by dualistic framings opposing heritage expertise to the non-expert perspectives of others. Against the grain of much recent work, Harrison has recently suggested conservation is: 'an heterogeneous and discontinuous series of domains of practice.' (2016 171). My account develops this insight ethnographically, revealing the myriad ways in which these logics are entangled in practice: how distinct versions of conservation overlap, intersect and diverge; are made to matter by specific people, with specific understandings of what is 'real' and important about the past; of how that importance relates to other kinds of commitments and values; and of how these intersect in relation to particular buildings and material circumstances. These interactions establish conservation variously as a valuable or problematic ideal, in relation to a range of other interests, and values, more or less sharply distinguished or opposed. As others have stressed, these include a capitalist logic of commodification (Franquesa, 2013) and the a nation state concerned to implicate the past as an index of the 'monumental' teleological time of the nation state (e.g. Herzfeld, 1991). Yet, if conservation is made to matter in relation to these other interests and values, ethnography helps remind us of the indeterminacies that arise as these intersect. Rather than read conservation discourses as instances of a systemic imperative, I have sought, to highlight the situated negotiations and everyday ethical dilemmas that occur (cf. Laidlaw, 2014); how people navigate between versions of conservation which are internally contradictory with one another; and with other kinds of 'good'.

Different practices situate these concerns in distinct ways which are nonetheless related and made to cohere. Moving beyond discursively focused deconstructive approaches to heritage and conservation, my aim has been to bring to light an understanding of conservation that is situated but substantial. I have sought to illustrate how the principles and philosophies of conservation are performatively realised made to matter in a range of ways, including through acts of building, designing, living, owning and legislating. Elsewhere Sian Jones and I (2013) have sought to highlight the epistemic dimensions to these

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negotiations in relation to professional conservationists. Here I extend that work to reveal how conservation comes to matter for a broader range of actors, and as a diverse range of orientations, not only as a way of knowing but also, indissolubly, as ethical orientations, emotions, identities and ideologies of various kinds. Echoing recent work in critical heritage studies, Franquesa describes heritage as an 'empty category' (2013: 347), a term that captures the potential openness of these discursive forms and principles, but does not sufficiently account for the material and meaningful ways in which it is elaborated, in practice, in multiple specific ways (Brumann, 2014). If the concept is abstractly empty, I have aimed to demonstrate how it is filled out in myriad specific ways of giving it substance, form and meaning.

While these activities do not follow deterministically from the material properties of buildings as authentic embodiments of the past, deconstructive critiques have tended to elide key elements of these practices, critiquing at the expense of apprehending what is practically at stake for those involved (Brumann, 2014, Jones and Yarrow, 2013). Likewise, efforts to highlight 'material agency' often foreclose ethnographic attention to the various ways in which agency is ascribed, and to questions of how this is locally attributed.

I have sought, instead, to trace ethnographically how these emerge as an animating force. Others have highlighted how the process of conservation creates the past as a specific kind of object (e.g. Franquesa, 2013, Smith, 2006) but have given less attention to the ways in which historic objects, in this instance buildings, are understood to frame and constrain actions in the present. Temporally speaking, conservation is associated with a commitment to the past and an effort to act with this in mind. Rather than deconstruct this teleological orientation I have aimed to show how it is elaborated through specific forms of practice: as ways of tracing out the present and future, according to an existing logic or set of material circumstances. Those involved do not deny their own role in these acts of construction but see their actions as inspired, animated or constrained by the past as embodied in already existing circumstances. This temporal orientation to buildings, invests them with a material significance that is individualised in a range of ways, including through notions of character, authenticity and personality. While acts of renovation often throw these qualities into question, conservation operates as an imperative to retention. If, as Lyon (2012) observes,

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buildings are often attributed a ‘thing-like character’, relatively little attention has been given to the question of how this is made, attributed and negotiated in practice. Inspired by post-human conceptualisations of buildings as complex assemblages of people and materials (Brand, 1994, Yaneva, 2008, Buchli, 2013, Lawrence Zuniga, 2016, Strebel, 2011), the paper has nevertheless extended this work to highlight how oppositions between people and buildings, are practically and conceptually elaborated.

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